Study Questions: Simón Bolívar’s Cartagena Manifesto

The Cartagena Manifesto, written on December 15, 1812, was the work of Simón Bolívar, whose name survives as that of one of the chief liberators of the nations of South America from Spanish rule. Bolívar was Venezuelan, but after the collapse of his nation’s First Republic, formed at the beginning of the Venezuelan War of Independence (1811–1823), he departed to live in exile in modern-day Colombia. In the city of Cartagena de Indias (Cartagena of the Indies), he wrote a manifesto outlining what he perceived to be the causes for the First Republic’s collapse. In doing so, he implicitly outlined what he believed should be the shape of a future Venezuelan republic or of any South American republic. More explicitly, his goal in the manifesto was to seek support for an invasion of Venezuela to oust the Spanish.

1. Compare and contrast the roles of Simón Bolívar in the Venezuelan independence movement and William of Orange in the Dutch independence movement, as reflected in the Dutch Declaration of Independence.

2. From a modern perspective, an examination of such documents as the Requerimiento, the Dutch Declaration of Independence, and the Cartagena Manifesto, along with the events surrounding them, creates an impression of Spanish rule as brutal and tyrannical. Imagine that you have been tasked with the job of defending the Spanish. How would you do so?

3. From one point of view, Bolívar’s efforts were ultimately a failure, at least in part. Do you think that this diminishes his status as an important South American leader?

4. How would Bolívar have reacted to the Korean Declaration of Independence if he had had an opportunity to read it?

5. In the manifesto Bolívar makes reference to “stupid people” and “rustics”; in general, his attitude toward many Venezuelans seems haughty and aristocratic. How would you reconcile this attitude with his position as the “Liberator of Five Nations” and a hero in South America, where the monuments to him are almost uncountable?